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Critical SAVE the Children legislation goes to the governor

LANSING—The Michigan Senate today unanimously passed a landmark legislative package to help prevent early learning failure and provide students tools for educational success and skills for life success, said Sen. Nancy Cassis, the key sponsor and coordinator of the SAVE the Children package.

Cassis sponsored a key bill in the package that establishes an Early Intervening Grant Program, administered by the Department of Education. Senate Bill 329 would allow schools with successful intervention models to act as instructional mentors for other school districts interested in setting up their own program. It is targeted at school districts that have special education populations exceeding the state average. School districts with a percentage of pupils reading below grade level would also be eligible.

“It is vital for the children of our state that they don’t fall through the cracks of the educational system when they are most vulnerable—from kindergarten through third grades,” said Cassis, R-Novi. “Like the Northville School program on which this package is modeled, it will prevent academic problems from leading to failure by recommending appropriate interventions for our youngest students.

“To give these children hope both inside and outside the four walls of their school, to build their confidence as they learn to succeed academically, to provide cost savings to schools while we do it—the Legislature has said yes to these worthwhile goals by passing this program. Do school districts across Michigan want to help their students avoid academic problems later in life, and in turn save millions of dollars by intervening early? Of course they do.”

Last year the Northville program saved Northville Public Schools \$7.3 million.

“That is money that can be redirected back into the classroom, where it is needed most,” said Cassis. “At a time when we are raising the bar on high-school graduation requirements and concerns have been raised about potential dropouts and the financial cost to society, this program can get children on the right track to avoid later need for special education, higher dropout rates, and risky adolescent behavior. A well-educated workforce starts with a strong academic beginning.

“The Legislature has taken an important step by passing this program. We will help ensure that our youngest students get the best start for learning. Early identification of learning problems and subsequent intervention are critical for the future of our schoolchildren and our state. I urge the governor to sign this legislation.”

Senator Cassis also sponsored an amendment to the School Aid Budget this week to provide the funding for the grant program.

The SAVE the Children package now goes to the governor. The School Aid Budget, SB 1095, passed the Senate on Wednesday and will now be sent to the House.